

it cannot continue this way. When a bill comes back that funds the entire Government and we are forced to vote for the bill or shut down the Government, that bill is going to pass. This means that if I consent to letting this bill go to conference, I am essentially consenting to enact whatever the conferees want to insert in the bill unamended.

We put a lot of trust in our conferees, and all I was asking was for an understanding from the committee that we know, at least in general, where the conference will be headed. I have not been able to get this commitment. I was given no information and no assurances.

Therefore, I am compelled to do what I think is right to protect the taxpayers and to provide integrity and accountability in the spending process.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, let me say right upfront, I hope this objection will go away sometime today. I think we are talking about whether something is done in writing or whether it is semantics. I didn't have to agree to what was in the letter that was written to the leader because our Military Construction bill meets all of the criteria they set forth. I didn't have to agree to their letter because everything in our bill is authorized or it is in the President's bill or it is in the future years' designations of priority by the Department of Defense. That is called a FYDP. It meets those criteria. We don't put provisions in our military construction conference committee reports that are not in the House or Senate bill.

All I can do is give my word that this is not going to turn into an omnibus. I am giving my word it is not going to be an omnibus. It is going to be the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill that was passed unanimously by the Senate.

I hope that all of the relevant parties will be able to sit down because I can't call this up for a vote. It would be spread out for so long as to lose the ability to go to conference. The House is planning to go out of session at the end of this week. I would stay here for 2 weeks to finish this bill because there is so much in it that is important. It is all new starts. This bill is filled with the priorities that the Department of Defense has in facilities on military bases all over this country, including quality-of-life housing for our military men and women. It has veterans affairs priorities and increases in funding for mental health and for research into post-traumatic stress syndrome. There are many items in this bill that will not be covered in a continuing resolution.

I hope we will all be able to sit down together. I hope the House will cooperate if we send this conference committee request to them. I am prepared to work all night and all day tomorrow to try to fit all of the timeframes.

Let me end by saying that we are very close between the House and the Senate. I think we can work out the differences between the House and the Senate. I am saying right now this will not turn into an omnibus appropriations bill. It will be a bill that funds military housing and quality of life for our men and women in the military and their families, and it will have the new starts that cannot be covered by a continuing resolution. We certainly meet the criteria or the Senate wouldn't have passed the bill unanimously.

So I am not saying the Senator from South Carolina is wrong in his statements about what happens in conference committee reports in many other areas and in the history of the Senate. He is right. Sometimes a conference report will turn into an omnibus, and sometimes you find things that are not in either the House or Senate bill. But I am saying today that would not be the case in our bill, nor has it been the case that I can remember in past bills. Maybe I am forgetting something. But by and large, our bill is straightforward. And by and large, our bill is supported by the entire Senate. It is not very far from the bill that the House passed, and I think if we all put our minds to this and put away—I don't think our leadership would be required to sign a letter and I don't think the chairman of the Appropriations Committee should be required to sign a letter. I think we should be good for our word around here. If we are not, then we have lost the spirit of this institution.

So I am saying today that I am going to go back to the drawing board. I am going to work with the Senator from South Carolina and the Senators from Oklahoma. I am going to work with my counterparts on the House side, and I am going to try to get a bill through here, and I am not going to stop trying for the rest of the time that one of our Houses is in session. I think we owe it to our men and women in the military, we owe it to the veterans who have already served. We owe it to those people who are coming back here without limbs that we are funding at additional levels, not only the prosthetics but also the training on how to be proficient in using those artificial limbs. Madam President, I think we can do it. I am committed to trying, and I hope everybody who is involved in this process will also try.

Let me also add that my counterpart, Senator FEINSTEIN, who is the ranking member of this subcommittee, is in full support of this bill. I have talked to her about the issue I am trying to address, and she is ready to go to conference. I do believe that if we will sit down and talk with everyone who is interested, everybody would be satisfied that we will keep our word and we will do what we intended to do, anyway, which is conference a bill that is going to take the differences in the House and Senate bills and resolve those dif-

ferences. That is what we are supposed to do, and that is what I am committed to do.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I know we have the call for party lunches. I have some comments which are heartfelt about a colleague of ours, PAUL SARBANES, and I wonder if the Chair would indulge us for a few minutes to be able to make these comments now. We are debating the Secretary of Defense, but we have set that aside until after the conferences of our parties. Would it be permissible with the Chair if I made some brief comments?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank the Chair for her courteousness and understanding.

(The remarks of Mr. KENNEDY are printed in today's RECORD under "Morning Business.")

## RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now stand in recess until the hour of 2:15 p.m. today.

Whereupon, the Senate, at 12:56 p.m.; recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. SUNUNU).

## NOMINATION OF ROBERT M. GATES—Continued

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, on behalf of the leader, I ask unanimous consent that at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow the majority leader be recognized to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

## THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I come to the floor here today to share with my colleagues and my constituents my frustration with the inaction of Congress on its most basic responsibility, to enact bills to make appropriations for the Government for the coming year.

No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law; and a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money shall be published from time to time.

That is the Constitution of the United States. There is no responsibility more fundamental than the one I